

# BELL, HOWERTON BLAST PONTIAC SILVERDOME

*And a New Battle Shapes Up for The 1980 Supercross Title*

By Brian George

In the last Supercross writeup given to you out of the infamous pages of DIRT BIKE Magazine's June '80 issue, there was a complete rundown of the entire first half of the 1980 AMA Supercross Championship Series all the way through the end of the two rounds in Houston, Texas. Team Yamaha's Mike Bell proved to be the main force in the first half of the series.

Then the series came to Pontiac, Michigan, for the race on the tight, tricky course laid out on the floor of the Silverdome, which has the smallest track of the series. Also coming to Pontiac were a few changes. Team Suzuki, after spending the entire first seven races getting pounded to death by their special "stadium" bikes, brought in the 250 National mounts used by Kent Howerton for the entire team. Kent himself had been making a shambles of the 250cc Nationals up until that point on the special bike, during the six-week spread in between Supercross events. The switch of bikes was due to the power and suspension disadvantages of the stadium Suzukis, which were shorter, with a smaller wheelbase, and a different engine than the outdoor bikes.

Howerton pointed out to the Suzuki engineers that in Houston the Yamahas and Hondas, which were already outdoor motorcycles, were going through the rough faster and easier than the Suzuki Supercrossers, which spent a majority of the time careening off of everything on the stadium floor. All



*Still proving to be the man to beat in Supercross, Team Yamaha's Mike Bell left Pontiac with a win the first night and a third in the final, along with a 34-point lead in the points standings.*

the time this was going on, the bikes were getting poor starts because the engine lacked the horsepower advantage of the outdoor mounts.

Finally, they listened to Kent, and admitted the fact that their present setup wasn't working, so they let Kent bring his "National" bike to Pontiac, with its longer suspension, and a motor that, thanks to mechanic Greg Arnett, had holeshot just about everything Howerton entered. The factory promptly ordered new 250 "National" frames for the rest of the team, and new cylinders

were installed, just like Howerton's racer.

As for the other teams, Honda showed up with both air- and water-cooled motorcycles, but rookie Donnie Hansen was the only team member to go with the exotic plumbing. Everyone else ran the air-cooled Pro-Links, including Chuck Sun. Yamaha brought in new bikes for all of their riders, but nothing radical went on. As for Kawasaki, their three-rider team of Warren Reid, Jeff Ward and Larry Wosick was on the usual factory mean greens, Uni-Trak-suspended and very fast.

### Saturday Night

When I first strolled into the press box on the third level of the Silverdome and looked out over the track, the first thought was: "What a joke. That track isn't even wide enough for a mini race, let alone a full-on Supercross." Everything looked one-lined, all of the jumps and bumps were very sharply peaked, ruts were forming at the take-off points of all the jumps and there was no scheduled run for the bulldozer after practice. The first turn was utterly ridiculous, running 25 riders from the 20-yard width of the starting gate into a hairpin tight left, about ten feet wide. When Larry Huffman interviewed the top ten points leaders before the first qualifier, the riders felt pretty much the same.

But, why then did the best racing so far this year in all of Supercross take place right on that same surface, for two consecutive nights? It was definite-





*Pontiac's final main event was almost Mark Barnett's, but a bobble in the last turn of the last lap left him a foot short of victory.*

ly hard for a rider to pass another, but it could be done. Anybody who thought that just a wide-open throttle would win it for them, found themselves lying off to the side of the track, learning the finer points of dirt eating.

Kent Howerton probably answered the question of why the racing was so good, when he said, "This track is so short, that even if you're far behind, you can still see the guy ahead of you, and just that alone, being able to see him, makes you push harder, because you think you can catch him."

Those were the exact thoughts that helped Kent in both finals, as he came from behind in both Saturday night's and Sunday afternoon's racing.

In the Saturday final, the lineup read Bell, Gibson, Rex Staten, Donnie Hansen, Rick Burgett, Marty Tripes, Chuck Sun, Broc Glover, Billy Grossi, Kippy Pierce, Kent Howerton, Steve Wise, David Bailey, Ross Williams, Danny LaPorte, Warren Reid, Mark Barnett, Donnie Cantaloupi, Larry Wosick and Marty Moates, Darrell Shultz, Brian Myerscough, Marty Smith, Mark Gregson and Jeff Ward. Mike Bell won the first qualifier, while Marty Tripes, looking his best this year in Supercross, passed an ailing Chuck Sun for the second qualifier win.

Sun had been suffering from the flu all week, and was feeling the pains of it the entire weekend.

The third qualifier saw Kent Howerton roost off to a win, while the fourth run was all Warren Reid's, as he motored to a comfortable win ahead of Barnett, who was centerpunched in the first turn after grabbing the holeshot, then came from dead last to second in the ten laps. Suzuki's Darrell Shultz and Marty Smith won the two semis, and Kawasaki's Jeff Ward had to make the main via the consolation.

At the start of the main event, the pack roared into the first hairpin, and when they came out, Bell was in command. It looked like the start of Houston all over again when Glover pulled into second ahead of Tripes, Howerton and Barnett.

On the second lap, Howerton passed Tripes in the rough whoops along the back straight, but Marty was right on the Suzuki's rear fender all the way. As the two headed in front of the start line and into a fast right/left-sweeper ess, Tripes went underneath Howerton, who promptly went to the outside of the right-hander. As Howerton exited the outside of the right and headed for the wall of the left sweeper, Tripes was preparing to cut the left sharp, and

Howerton's Suzuki met the Yamaha of Tripes with full force. Tripes went down, and dropped outside of the top ten, from which point he proceeded to fall back to dead last by the finish.

After the Tripes incident, Howerton passed Glover, but Bell was way out in front. Howerton could still see him, however, and set out to catch him before the halfway mark and make a race out of it for the two of them. Unfortunately, once he did reel in Bell, a very controversial situation arose when the two of them began to lap Tripes. Bell quickly went by his teammate, but when Howerton tried to pass, he found no room, and Tripes on the gas. It took him a full lap to get around to the finish flagger's area, where Tripes received the blue flag from the official, and pulled outside to let Howerton pass. But in that lap, Bell had pulled away, and it took Kent two more laps to get close enough to attempt any kind of a pass.

After he caught Bell, Tripes came into the picture once more, and this time it took Kent a while to again get back around the lapped Tripes. This time he made it by sooner, and Bell hadn't pulled away quite as far. The duo set up a beautiful, crowd-pleasing battle for the lead, which Bell held com-

mand of for a full lap. Traffic then piled up and there was yet another alleged block on Howerton, this one from Staten, who stayed in front of the runner-up for a lap before Howerton could find a way past. By this time, there were only two laps left, and Howerton pulled out all the stops in trying to catch Bell, but he fell half a bike length short at the finish. After the race Suzuki Team Manager Mark Blackwell was outraged, as was Howerton.

Probably the saddest part of the whole deal wasn't that Kent was blocked, but that it made Bell, who had nothing whatsoever to do with it, look bad, and it deflated his win. He and mechanic Dave Osterman have been working hard all season, and deserved the win, but not the bad publicity from it. There is no way of saying that, had there been no alleged blocking, Bell would not have won, or that Howerton would have run away with the remaining laps. Kent will be the first to admit that. But, both wish that there had been a clear track and another few laps, so the two of them could have put on a clean racing performance for the fans.

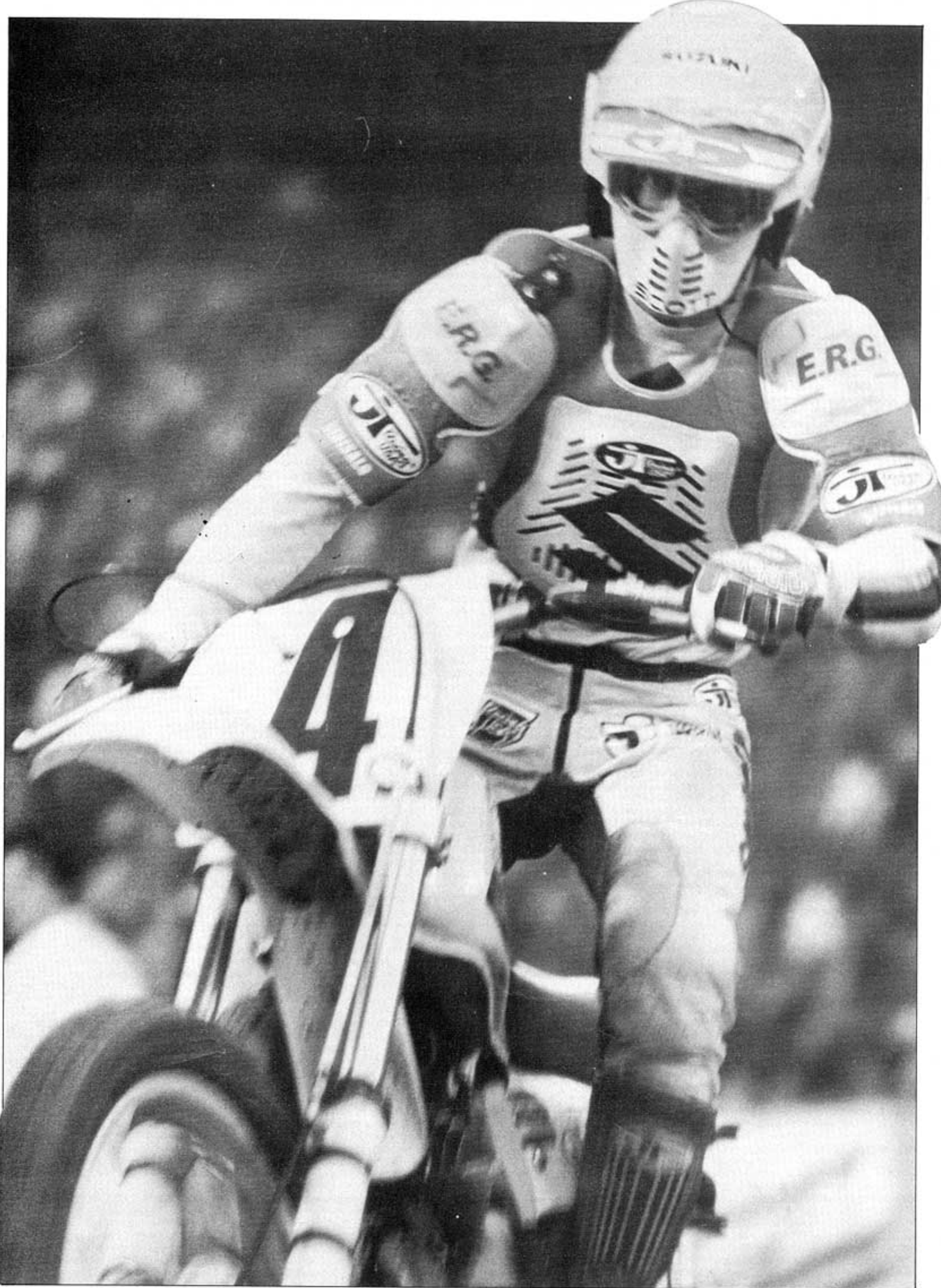
#### **Sunday Afternoon**

Everything seemed to blow over Saturday night and Sunday morning, because when everyone showed up at the racetrack Sunday afternoon, all was quiet on the battlefield. Riders were concentrating on the race ahead of them, not on what was behind.

The lineup for Sunday's main event read Barnett, Bell, Myerscough, Rob Reisinger, John Day, Sun, Glover, Wosick, Hansen, Burgett, Howerton, Cantaloupi, Frank Stacy, Wise, Tommy Croft, Gibson, Tripes, Shultz, Tommy Benolkin, Mark Rakestraw, Ward, Staten, Reid, Moates and Mike Guerra.

Barnett led the first qualifier all the way ahead of Bell, while in the second, Sun did the same number on Glover. Howerton won the third qualifier, despite having to ride the last half of the race with a broken rear backing plate, a dangling rod on the swingarm and no rear brakes. Then, in qualifier four, Gibson defeated Tripes. Kawasaki teamsters Jeff Ward and Warren Reid took the two semi wins, as Husqvarna's Mike Guerra picked up the final transfer in the consolation moto.

Barnett and Howerton went into the first turn one-two, but when they split and Howerton went wide as Barnett held low, Staten shot his Yamaha right through the middle and grabbed the lead. Howerton tucked in behind, Barnett followed, and Bell and Glover



*Kent Howerton brought his Suzuki 250cc National bike to the Silverdome, then took it to a 2-1 weekend and a tie with Honda's Chuck Sun for second in the points race.*



*The outdoor Suzukis brought in at Howerton's request were much more powerful out of the hole, as seen here, with Barnett (10), pulling everybody off of the line in his qualifier.*

moved into the top five.

Barnett took the most chances of the leading riders, jumping two of the three tetrads alongside the back straight at once, and this feat put him by Howerton, and ultimately by Staten for the lead. From that point on Barnett rode a furious race, passing lapped riders at will and extending his lead over Staten more and more as the final progressed.

Howerton worked on getting around Staten for a few laps until he landed on Staten's left shoulder after a teton that the Rocket nearly failed to clear, and didn't get away from quickly enough. With his whole left side numbing, Staten soon fell victim to the passes of Bell, Glover and Sun.

In the meantime, Howerton was pressing on after Barnett, and when the white flag came out, Barnett began making mistakes, like missing a shift in a fast, multi-lined right-hander after the big crossover jump. Howerton almost got by there, but Barnett somehow managed to hold on.

From there it was only a few more turns until the finish, and Barnett had the win all but sealed in a bag. Then, in the last corner, Barnett played it too safe and went inside into a deep berm



**This is Laurens Offner and Mark "hi" Gregson. Laurens owns LOP (Laurens Offner Products for all you trivia nuts), and does a lot of wrenching himself out at the track. Who says the rich life can't be fun, too, right Lenny?**

very slowly and cautiously. He was a mere ten feet from the checkered flag when his tire slipped up and over the berm, and Barnett almost took a trip to the floor. Howerton, who instinctively took the outside line, but knew he had no hope of passing Barnett in the turn, was shocked as he saw Barnett floundering. A quick jerk on the throttle put him out into the checkered flag which was awaiting, and he beat Barnett by six inches.

After it was all over, Howerton and wrench Arnett went into the pits with the excitement of two kids on their first frog hunt, and a tie in series points with Chuck Sun for second place. Bell somewhat uneventfully took third, but when he left Pontiac, he was sporting a huge 34-point lead heading into the New Orleans round.

Maybe now that Howerton has his outdoor bike and is the hottest rider in the nation, he can match Bell's pace.

Only time will tell, but there is the possibility of a race down to the wire there, with seven events left to go. □

**RESULTS  
SATURDAY**

1. Mike Bell (Yam); 2. Kent Howerton (Suz); 3. Broc Glover (Yam); 4. Jim Gibson (Hon); 5. Rick Burgett (Yam); 6. Darrell Shultz (Suz); 7. Mark Barnett (Suz); 8. Larry Wosick (Kaw); 9. Donnie Cantaloupi (Yam); 10. Chuck Sun (Hon); 11. Jeff Ward (Kaw); 12. Marty Smith (Suz); 13. Brian Myerscough (Suz); 14. Rex Staten (Yam); 15. Mark Gregson (Yam); 16. Bill Grossi (Hus); 17. Marty Moates (Yam); 18. Steve Wise (Hon); 19. Kippy Pierce (Yam); 20. Warren Reid (Kaw); 21. Ross Williams (Hus); 22. Donnie Hansen (Hon); 23. David Bailey (Kaw); 24. Danny LaPorte (Suz).

**SUNDAY**

1. Kent Howerton (Suz); 2. Mark Barnett (Suz); 3. Mike Bell (Yam); 4. Broc Glover (Yam); 5. Chuck Sun (Hon); 6. Rex Staten (Yam); 7. Steve Wise (Hon); 8. Jim Gibson (Hon); 9. Darrell Shultz (Suz); 10. Marty Tripes (Yam); 11. Donnie Cantaloupi (Yam); 12. Brian Myerscough (Suz); 13. Frank Stacy (KTM); 14. Donnie Hansen (Hon); 15. Warren Reid (Kaw); 16. Mike Guerra (Hus); 17. Jeff Ward (Kaw); 18. Marty Moates (Yam); 19. Larry Wosick (Kaw); 20. Mark Rakestraw (Hon); 21. Tommy Benolkin (Hon); 22. Robert Reisinger (Kaw); 23. Rick Burgett (Yam).

**AMA SUPERCROSS SERIES  
POINT STANDINGS**

1. Mike Bell (211); 2. (TIE) Chuck Sun/Kent Howerton (177); 4. Mark Barnett (151); 5. Jim Gibson (145); 6. Broc Glover (134); 7. Steve Wise (98); 8. Warren Reid (86); 9. Brian Myerscough (85); 10. (TIE) Rex Staten/Donnie Hansen (76); 12. Jeff Ward (68); 13. Danny LaPorte (62); 14. Arlo Englund (54); 15. Marty Tripes (52); 16. Marty Smith (46); 17. Larry Wosick (45); 18. Jimmy Weinert (37); 19. Jimmy Ellis (33); 20. Gary Semics (17).



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